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MONTANA BIG GAME RANGE PROTECTED BY PUBLIC LANDS WITHDRAWAL

Acting Secretary of the Interior Clarence A. Davis announced today withdrawal of 1600 acres of public land in Jefferson County, Montana to consolidate the State's Bull Mountain winter big-game range.

This withdrawal is in line with the Department of the Interior's policy to expand and increase available areas for the protection of wildlife, Mr. Davis said.

Authority for the withdrawal is provided under the Coordination Act of August 14, 1946, which calls for cooperation among Federal, State, and other agencies in developing a nation-wide program of wildlife conservation and rehabilitation.

Situated between Whitehall and Boulder Hot Springs on Little Whitetail Creek this vital winter big-game habitat is adjacent to the Deer Lodge National Forest. The Montana Department of Fish and Game has a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project, with plans for more than twenty-six thousand acres of elk, deer, and antelope winter range on Bull Mountain.

The 2½ sections of "moderate to steep slopes" included in the withdrawal order will consolidate previous areas acquired by the State and will provide considerable relief in a problem area by assuring adequate range for the elk, thereby keeping them off private lands further down the valley. Elk, driven from the mountains to lower altitudes by snow, are notorious for the damage they do to farmers' haystacks.

It is estimated that 150 elk, 200 mule deer and 50 pronghorn antelope regularly winter on the Bull Mountain Range. Bureau of Land Management officials have stated that making the lands available to big game in no way conflicts with any of that bureau's programs, and is in the best public interest. The Fish and Wildlife Service has approved inclusion of the lands in the State Federal Aid project.

Since the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Program, administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service, was initiated in 1938, the State of Montana has emphasized the acquisition of lands for badly needed big-game winter ranges.

Some of the most important of these areas are the Sun River Elk Range, in Lewis & Clark and Teton Counties; the Gallatin Elk Range in Gallatin and Madison Counties; the Blackfoot-Clearwater Elk Range in Powell and Missoula Counties; the Madison Elk Range in Madison County; and the Judith River Game Range in Judith Basin County.

Many of these areas have involved the assignment of public domain for wildlife purposes. Pittman-Robertson cooperative funds have been used by the Montana Fish and Game Commission for land acquisition to round out the privately owned lands in these big-game management areas.